



## INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(51) International Patent Classification<sup>6</sup> :

H04J 14/02, H04B 10/00

A1

(11) International Publication Number:

WO 99/17485

(43) International Publication Date:

8 April 1999 (08.04.99)

(21) International Application Number: PCT/US98/20747

(22) International Filing Date: 30 September 1998 (30.09.98)

(30) Priority Data:

60/060,526

30 September 1997 (30.09.97) US

(71) Applicant: ALCATEL NETWORK SYSTEMS, INC.  
[US/US]; 44983 Knoll Square, Ashburn, VA 20147 (US).

(72) Inventors: DUGAN, J., M.; 909 Willow Crest Drive, Richardson, TX 75081 (US). MAXHAM, Kenneth. Y.; 404 Meadowcrest Drive, Richardson, TX 75080 (US).

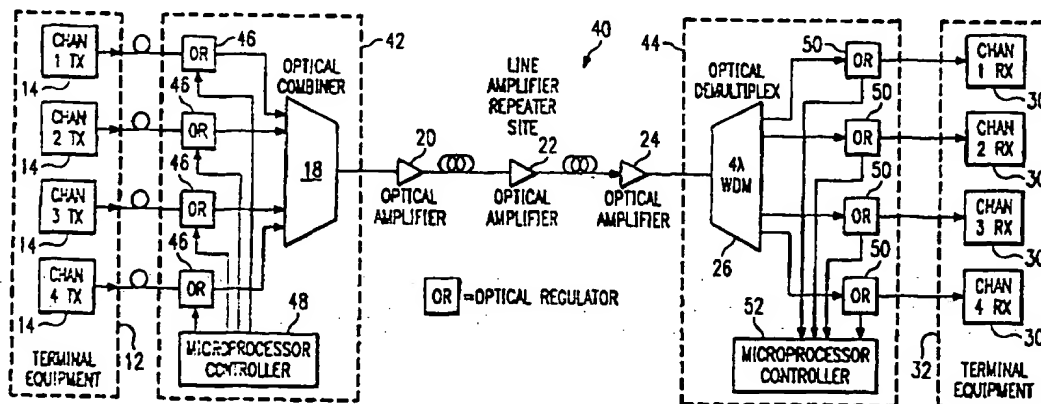
(74) Agents: REITER, Stephen, E. et al.; Gray Cary Ware &amp; Freidenrich, Suite 1440, 100 Congress Avenue, Austin, TX 78701 (US).

(81) Designated States: CA, JP.

Published

With international search report.

(54) Title: OPTICAL CHANNEL REGULATOR AND METHOD



## (57) Abstract

An optical channel regulator (46) is provided. The optical channel regulator (46) includes a tapped optical coupler (60) receiving an optical line carrying an optical signal. The tapped optical coupler (60) provides substantially all of the optical signal as an output. An electrically variable optical attenuator (64) receives the output of the tapped optical coupler (60) and attenuates the optical signal responsive to a feedback control signal. A second tapped optical coupler (66) receives an output of the attenuator (64). The second coupler (66) provides substantially all of the received optical signal as an output and provides a remaining portion of the optical signal as a tapped output. An optical detector (68) then receives the tapped output and provides an output signal representing the optical signal. A comparator (70) receives the output signal of the optical detector (68) and a reference signal. The comparator (70) compares the output signal and the reference signal and provides the feedback control signal to the attenuator (64) responsive to the comparison. As part of a multi-channel communication system, the regulator is used to adjust the levels of each channel for automatically maintaining channel balance and equalization.

**FOR THE PURPOSES OF INFORMATION ONLY**

Codes used to identify States party to the PCT on the front pages of pamphlets publishing international applications under the PCT.

AL	Albania	ES	Spain	LS	Lesotho	SI	Slovenia
AM	Armenia	FI	Finland	LT	Lithuania	SK	Slovakia
AT	Austria	FR	France	LU	Luxembourg	SN	Senegal
AU	Australia	GA	Gabon	LV	Larvia	SZ	Swaziland
AZ	Azerbaijan	GB	United Kingdom	MC	Monaco	TD	Chad
BA	Bosnia and Herzegovina	GE	Georgia	MD	Republic of Moldova	TG	Togo
BB	Barbados	GH	Ghana	MG	Madagascar	TJ	Tajikistan
BE	Belgium	GN	Guinea	MK	The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	TM	Turkmenistan
BF	Burkina Faso	GR	Greece	ML	Mali	TR	Turkey
BG	Bulgaria	HU	Hungary	MN	Mongolia	TT	Trinidad and Tobago
BJ	Benin	IE	Ireland	MR	Mauritania	UA	Ukraine
BR	Brazil	IL	Israel	MW	Malawi	UG	Uganda
BY	Belarus	IS	Iceland	MX	Mexico	US	United States of America
CA	Canada	IT	Italy	NE	Niger	UZ	Uzbekistan
CF	Central African Republic	JP	Japan	NL	Netherlands	VN	Viet Nam
CG	Congo	KE	Kenya	NO	Norway	YU	Yugoslavia
CH	Switzerland	KG	Kyrgyzstan	NZ	New Zealand	ZW	Zimbabwe
CI	Côte d'Ivoire	KP	Democratic People's Republic of Korea	PL	Poland		
CM	Cameroon	KR	Republic of Korea	PT	Portugal		
CN	China	KZ	Kazakistan	RO	Romania		
CU	Cuba	LC	Saint Lucia	RU	Russian Federation		
CZ	Czech Republic	LI	Liechtenstein	SD	Sudan		
DE	Germany	LK	Sri Lanka	SE	Sweden		
DK	Denmark	LR	Liberia	SG	Singapore		
EE	Estonia						

## OPTICAL CHANNEL REGULATOR AND METHOD

5    TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

        This invention relates in general to optical communication systems, and more particularly to an optical channel regulator and method.

10

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

        In multiple channel wavelength division multiplexed (WDM) communication systems, optical amplifiers are used  
15   to boost signal powers to provide for longer transmission spans. When using optical amplifiers in such systems, it is important to balance the channels at the input to the amplifiers to assure that the available amplifier output power is shared equally among the channels. If the  
20   channels are not balanced across each amplifier input, the weaker signals reduce the transmission span distance.

        Another problem faced is that optical amplifiers used in multiple channel wavelength division multiplexed  
25   communication systems often do not have uniform gain across all of the optical channels. This creates some channel imbalance. In other systems where optical amplifiers are used as repeaters, the cascade of the amplifiers results in signal inequalities even when they  
30   are well balanced at the head end.

        Other problems relate to the configuration of a bi-directional line amplifier (BDLA) which uses a single

amplifier. The receive signals from each direction needs to be balanced to assure proper gain and power sharing in the amplifier. Further, significant power level imbalances between channels at the end of a cascade of amplifiers may require attenuation of the strong channels to keep the signal level to the receiver at an acceptable level.

One conventional solution to balancing of channels has been to insert manually selected fixed attenuators or manually adjusted variable attenuators in each channel path before multiplexing them together. However, the selection or the adjustment of the attenuators requires manual measurement of each optical channel, since the source transmitter power level for each channel varies and is not precisely known beforehand. Furthermore, when the source transmit power changes, due to aging or module replacement, the attenuator adjustment process has to be repeated.

20

#### SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides an optical channel regulator method that substantially eliminates or reduces disadvantages and problems associated with previously developed optical channel regulation schemes.

More specifically, the present invention provides a method for regulating an optical channel. The optical channel regulator includes an electrically variable

30

optical attenuator receiving an optical signal. The attenuator attenuates the optical signal responsive to a feedback control signal and yields an attenuated optical signal. A tapped optical coupler receives the attenuated optical signal of the attenuator and provides substantially all of the attenuated optical signal as an output. The tapped optical coupler also provides a remaining portion of the attenuated optical signal as a tapped output. An optical detector receives the tapped output and provides an electrical signal representing the attenuated optical signal. A comparator receives the electrical signal of the optical detector and a reference signal. Finally, the comparator compares the electrical signal to the reference signal and provides a feedback control signal to the attenuator.

The present invention provides an important technical advantage by eliminating the need for manual measurement and selection of fixed attenuators required for balancing the channels.

The present invention provides another technical advantage by solving the problem of balancing the power levels at bi-directional line amplifiers using a single amplifier.

Additional technical advantages should be readily apparent from the drawings, description, and claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For a more complete understanding of the present invention and the advantages thereof, reference is now  
5 made to the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which like reference numerals indicate like features and wherein:

FIGURE 1 is a block diagram of one embodiment of a  
10 conventional four-channel wavelength division multiplexed communication system with optical amplification using unidirectional transmission on the optical fiber;

FIGURE 2 is a block diagram of one embodiment of an  
15 improved four-channel wavelength division multiplexed communication system with optical regulators according to the present invention;

FIGURE 3 is a block diagram of one embodiment of an  
20 optical regulator according to the present invention;

FIGURE 4 is a block diagram of one embodiment of a  
four-channel wavelength division multiplexed system using  
bi-directional transmission on the optical fiber  
25 according to the present invention;

FIGURE 5 is a block diagram of one embodiment of a  
bi-directional wavelength division multiplexed line  
amplifier with a single amplifier according to the  
30 present invention; and

FIGURE 6 is a block diagram of one embodiment of a wavelength division multiplexed communication system with end-to-end channel power control feedback according to the present invention.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Preferred embodiments of the present invention are illustrated in the FIGURES, like numerals being used to refer to like and corresponding parts of the various drawings.

The optical channel regulator of the present invention electronically performs a power level measurement for each channel of a wavelength division multiplexed communication system. The optical channel regulator of the present invention also electronically varies the path attenuation to bring all optical channels into balance before being combined in a multiplexer and before being amplified. If the balance changes at a later time, the control system automatically readjusts to maintain the balance.

More specifically, the present invention provides a method for regulating an optical channel. The optical channel regulator includes an electrically variable optical attenuator receiving an optical signal. The attenuator attenuates the optical signal responsive to a feedback control signal and yields an attenuated optical

signal. A tapped optical coupler receives the attenuated optical signal of the attenuator and provides substantially all of the attenuated optical signal as an output. The tapped optical coupler also provides a  
5 remaining portion of the attenuated optical signal as a tapped output. An optical detector receives the tapped output and provides an electrical signal representing the attenuated optical signal. A comparator receives the electrical signal of the optical detector and a reference  
10 signal. Finally, the comparator compares the electrical signal to the reference signal and provides a feedback control signal to the attenuator.

FIGURE 1 is a block diagram of one embodiment of a  
15 conventional unidirectional four-channel wavelength division multiplexed system, indicated generally at 10, with optical amplification. System 10 includes terminal equipment 12 having a plurality of transmit channels 14. Although only transmit channels 14 are shown in FIGURE 1,  
20 terminal equipment 12 may also include receive channels. Each transmit channel 14 is connected and provides an optical signal to a fixed attenuator 16. Each attenuator 16 is manually selected or adjusted, and provides fixed attenuation of the optical signal. The attenuators 16  
25 are connected to an optical combiner 18 that provides an output to an optical amplifier 20 which wavelength division multiplexes the plurality of optical signals. Optical amplifier 20 feeds an amplified signal to an optical amplifier 22. Optical amplifier 22 then feeds an  
30 optical amplifier 24. Optical amplifier 22 may be



located at a line amplifier repeater site, as shown. The number of optical amplifiers in the transmission path are dependent upon a number of factors, including the length over which the signal must travel.

5

Optical amplifier 24 provides an output to an optical demultiplexer 26 that recovers the plurality of optical signals and provides each optical signal to one of a plurality of fixed attenuators 28. The attenuators 28 are also manually selected or adjusted, and provide fixed attenuation of the optical signal. Each attenuator 28 is connected to a receive channel 30 of terminal equipment 32.

15 Fixed attenuators 16 and 28 operate to balance the optical channels, but are manually selected and installed or manually adjusted variable attenuators. The selection or adjustment of attenuators 16 and 28 involves manual measurement of each optical channel since the source 20 transmitter power level for each channel varies, and is not precisely known beforehand.

Furthermore, when the source transmit power changes, due to aging or module replacement, the attenuator 25 selection or adjustment process needs to be repeated. Thus, there is little flexibility when line conditions change.

FIGURE 2 is a block diagram of one embodiment of an 30 improved four-channel wavelength division multiplexed

system, indicated generally at 40, with optical regulators according to the present invention. As shown, system 40 is similar to system 10 of FIGURE 1. However, an optical regulator assembly 42 and an optical regulator assembly 44 have replaced the fixed attenuators 16 and 28 of FIGURE 1. In FIGURE 2, each transmit channel 14 is connected to an optical regulator 46 which then feeds optical combiner 18. As shown, each optical regulator 46 receives an input from a microprocessor controller 48. Similarly, the outputs of optical demultiplexer 26 are connected to optical regulators 50 that receive an input from a microprocessor controller 52.

According to the present invention, optical regulators 46 and 50 electronically perform a power level measurement for each channel and electronically vary the path attenuation to bring the optical channels into balance before being combined in optical combiner 18 and after being separated by optical demultiplexer 26. The input from microprocessor controllers 48 or 52 provide a level against which to compare the level of the respective channel. If the balance changes at a later time, system 40 can thus automatically readjust to maintain the balance.

25

FIGURE 3 is a block diagram of one embodiment of an optical regulator 46 (or 50) according to the present invention. Optical regulator 46 may include a tapped optical coupler 60 that receives an optical line carrying the optical signal. Tapped optical coupler 60 provides

30

substantially all of the optical signal (e.g., 95%) as an output to an electrically variable optical attenuator 64. The remaining portion of the signal (e.g., 5%) is provided to an optical detector 62 that provides an input  
5 monitor level signal, as shown. Optical attenuator 64 operates to attenuate the optical signal responsive to a feedback control signal. A second tapped optical coupler 66 receives the output of optical attenuator 64 and provides substantially all of the received optical signal  
10 (e.g., 95%) as an output. The remaining portion of the optical signal (e.g., 5%) is provided as a tapped output. An optical detector 68 receives the tapped output and provides an output signal (output monitor level) representing the optical signal to a comparator 70.  
15 Comparator 70 compares the output signal of optical detector 68 with a microprocessor controlled reference signal (microprocessor controlled power level) and, in response, provides the feedback control signal to optical attenuator 64.

20

According to the present invention, optical regulator 46 taps the optical line and compares the signal with a controlled power level. The controlled power level is provided by a microprocessor controller,  
25 for example as shown in FIGURE 2. The microprocessor controller receives the input monitor level from optical detector 62 and the output monitor level from output detector 68. The microprocessor controller then processes those inputs according to executed program code  
30 and generates the microprocessor controlled power level

used as a reference by comparator 70. Based upon the comparison, feedback may be provided to electrically vary optical attenuator 64 to regulate the power level of the optical signal. It should be noted that optimum balance  
5 often can be best determined at the received end of the systems. This may mean that the channels at the transmit end are deliberately unequal. It also should be noted that often the optimum balance at the receive end may be determined by signal-to-noise ratio rather than power  
10 level.

FIGURE 4 is a block diagram of one embodiment of a bi-directional four-channel wavelength division multiplexed system, indicated generally at 80, according  
15 to the present invention. System 80 includes terminal equipment 82 located at a first site. Terminal equipment 80 provides transmit channels 84 and receive channels 86. Each transmit channel 84 is connected to an optical regulator 88. Outgoing signals are multiplexed by a  
20 combiner 90, and incoming signals are separated by demultiplexer 91. Optical amplifiers 92 provide signals to or receive signals from a multiplexer 94, as shown. System 80 includes a bi-directional optical transmission line having a plurality of bi-directional line amplifiers  
25 96 located at repeater sites.

On the opposite side of the transmission line, a multiplexer 98 provides signals to and receives signals from amplifiers 100. Incoming signals are provided to a  
30 demultiplexer 102 to separate the multiplexed signals.

Outgoing signals are provided to a combiner 103 by optical regulators 104, as shown. Optical regulators 104 are connected as shown to terminal equipment 106 that provides receive channels 108 and transmit channels 110.

5 It should be understood that microprocessor control of optical regulators 88 and 104, although not shown, is similar to that shown in FIGURE 2.

FIGURE 5 is a block diagram of one embodiment of a

10 bi-directional wavelength division multiplexed line amplifier with a single amplifier according to the present invention. As shown, a multiplexer 120 communicates across a bi-directional line. Multiplexer 120 is connected to an optical regulator 122 which is

15 connected to another multiplexer 124. Multiplexer 124 is also connected to a second optical regulator 122, as shown. An optical amplifier 126 receives a signal from multiplexer 124 and provides an amplified signal to a multiplexer 128. Multiplexer 128, in turn provides

20 signals to a multiplexer 130 as well as multiplexer 120. As shown, the use of optical regulators 122 according to the present invention allows balancing of the power levels at bi-directional line amplifiers using a single amplifier 126.

25

FIGURE 6 is a block diagram of one embodiment of a wavelength division multiplexed system, 140, with end-to-end channel power control feedback according to the present invention. System 140 is similar to system 40 of

30 FIGURE 2. However, optical regulators 50 of FIGURE 2 are

shown as optical monitors 142. Note that the detector 62 in the optical regulator can be used for the optical monitor 142. Further, microprocessor controller 52 is linked to microprocessor controller 48 by a data communication link 144. The link provided by data communication link 144 allows feedback from one end point to the other concerning the channel power control provided by optical regulators 46 and optical monitors 142. This data communication link is typically provided by an optical supervisory channel that is integrated into the optical communication system.

Although the present invention has been described in detail, it should be understood that various substitutions, changes and alterations can be made hereto without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An optical channel regulator, comprising:  
an electrically variable optical attenuator
- 5 receiving an optical signal, the attenuator operating to attenuate the optical signal responsive to a feedback control signal and to provide an attenuated optical signal;
- a tapped optical coupler receiving the attenuated
- 10 optical signal of the attenuator, the optical coupler operating to provide substantially all of the attenuated optical signal as an output and to provide a remaining portion of the attenuated optical signal as a tapped output;
- 15 an optical detector receiving the tapped output and providing an electrical signal representing the attenuated optical signal; and
- a comparator receiving the electrical signal of the optical detector and a reference signal, the comparator
- 20 operating to compare the electrical signal, the reference signal, and responsive to the comparison to provide the feedback control signal to the attenuator.

2. The optical channel regulator of Claim 1 further comprising:

a second tapped optical coupler receiving an input optical signal, the second tapped optical coupler providing substantially all of the input optical signal as the optical signal received by the electrically variable optical attenuator and providing a remaining portion of the input optical signal as a tapped output; and

10 a second optical detector receiving the tapped output from the second tapped optical coupler and providing an electrical signal representing the input optical signal.

15 3. An optical regulator assembly comprising:

a plurality of optical channel regulators, each optical channel regulator comprising:

an electrically variable optical attenuator;

a tapped optical coupler;

20 an optical detector; and

a comparator; and

a microprocessor, operable to:

receive the electrical signal representing the attenuated optical signal from each of the plurality of

25 optical channel regulators;

generate a plurality of reference signals responsive to the electrical signals; and

provide a reference signal to the comparator in each of the plurality of optical channel regulators.

30



4. The optical channel regulator of claim 3,  
wherein each optical channel regulator further comprises:

a second tapped optical coupler receiving an input  
optical signal, the second tapped optical coupler

5 providing substantially all of the input optical signal  
as the optical signal received by the electrically  
variable optical attenuator and providing a remaining  
portion of the input optical signal as a tapped output;  
and

10 a second optical detector receiving the tapped  
output from the second tapped optical coupler and  
providing an electrical signal representing the input  
optical signal.

15 5. An optical channel regulator assembly  
comprising:

a plurality of optical channel regulators, each  
optical channel regulator comprising:

an electrically variable optical attenuator;  
20 a tapped optical coupler;  
an optical detector; and  
a comparator; and

a microprocessor, operable to:  
receive the electrical signal representing the  
25 input optical signal from each of the plurality of  
optical channel regulators;

generate a plurality of reference signals  
responsive to the electrical signals; and

provide a reference signal to the comparator in  
30 each of the plurality of optical channel regulators.

6. The optical channel regulator of claim 5,  
wherein each optical channel regulator further comprises:

5 a second tapped optical coupler receiving an input  
optical signal, the second tapped optical coupler  
providing substantially all of the input optical signal  
as the optical signal received by the electrically  
variable optical attenuator and providing a remaining  
portion of the input optical signal as a tapped output;  
10 and

a second optical detector receiving the tapped  
output from the second tapped optical coupler and  
providing an electrical signal representing the input  
optical signal.

15

7. A multiple channel wavelength division multiplexed communication system comprising:

- a plurality of transmission channels;
- a plurality of optical regulators operable to

5 receive a plurality of optical signals from said plurality of transmission channels, each optical regulator comprising:

- an electrically variable optical attenuator;
- a tapped optical coupler;

10 an optical detector; and

- a comparator;

a first microprocessor, operable to:

- receive an electrical signal representing the attenuated optical signal from each of the plurality of

15 optical regulators;

- generate a plurality of reference signals responsive to the electrical signals; and
- provide a reference signal to the comparator in each of the plurality of optical regulators;

20 an optical combiner operable to receive a plurality of said attenuated signals;

- a first optical amplifier operable to receive an output signal from said optical combiner;
- a second optical amplifier operable to receive an

25 output signal from said first optical amplifier;

- a third optical amplifier operable to receive an output signal from said second optical amplifier;
- an optical demultiplexer operable to receive an output signal from said third optical amplifier and

30 recover said plurality of optical signals;

a plurality of optical regulators operable to receive a plurality of optical signals from said optical demultiplexer, each optical regulator comprising:

5           an electrically variable optical attenuator;  
          a tapped optical coupler;  
          an optical detector; and  
          a comparator;

a second microprocessor, operable to:

10           receive the electrical signal representing the  
input optical signal from each of the plurality of  
optical regulators;

          generate a plurality of reference signals  
responsive to the electrical signals; and

15           provide a reference signal to the comparator in  
each of the plurality of optical regulators; and

          a plurality of receive channels operable to receive  
a plurality of optical signals from said plurality of  
optical regulators.

8. The optical channel regulator of claim 7,  
wherein each optical channel regulator further comprises:

a second tapped optical coupler receiving an input  
optical signal, the second tapped optical coupler  
5 providing substantially all of the input optical signal  
as the optical signal received by the electrically  
variable optical attenuator and providing a remaining  
portion of the input optical signal as a tapped output;  
and

10 a second optical detector receiving the tapped  
output from the second tapped optical coupler and  
providing an electrical signal representing the input  
optical signal.

15 9. A method for regulating an optical channel,  
comprising;

attenuating an optical signal responsive to a  
feedback control signal to provide an attenuated optical  
signal;

20 monitoring the attenuated optical signal; and  
generating the feedback control signal responsive to  
the monitoring of the attenuated optical signal.

10. The method of Claim 9, wherein monitoring  
25 comprises:

tapping the attenuated optical signal;  
providing substantially all of the attenuated  
optical signal as an output; and  
providing a remaining portion of the attenuated  
30 optical signal as a tapped output.

11. The method of Claim 10, wherein generating  
comprises comparing the tapped output with a reference  
level and creating the feedback control signal responsive  
5 to the comparison.

12. The method of Claim 9, wherein:  
monitoring further comprises monitoring the input  
optical signal; and  
10 generating further comprises generating the feedback  
control signal responsive to the monitoring of the input  
optical signal.

13. The method of Claim 9, wherein;  
15 monitoring further comprises tracking the optical  
signal-to-noise ratio at the receiving end of the  
transmission; and  
generating further comprises generating the feedback  
control signal responsive to the tracking of the optical  
20 signal-to-noise ratio.

14. A system for regulating optical channels comprising:

a plurality of transmission channels, each transmission channel comprising;

5 an input optical signal; and

a means for attenuating the input optical signal responsive to a feedback control signal to provide an attenuated optical signal; and

a controller, operable to:

10 monitor each of the attenuated optical signals on the plurality of transmission channels; and

generate a plurality of feedback control signals responsive to the monitoring of the attenuated optical signals.

15

15. The system of Claim 14, wherein the controller is further operable to:

monitor each of the optical signals on the plurality of transmission channels at any point along each

20 transmission channel; and

generate a plurality of feedback control signals responsive to the monitoring of the optical signals.

15

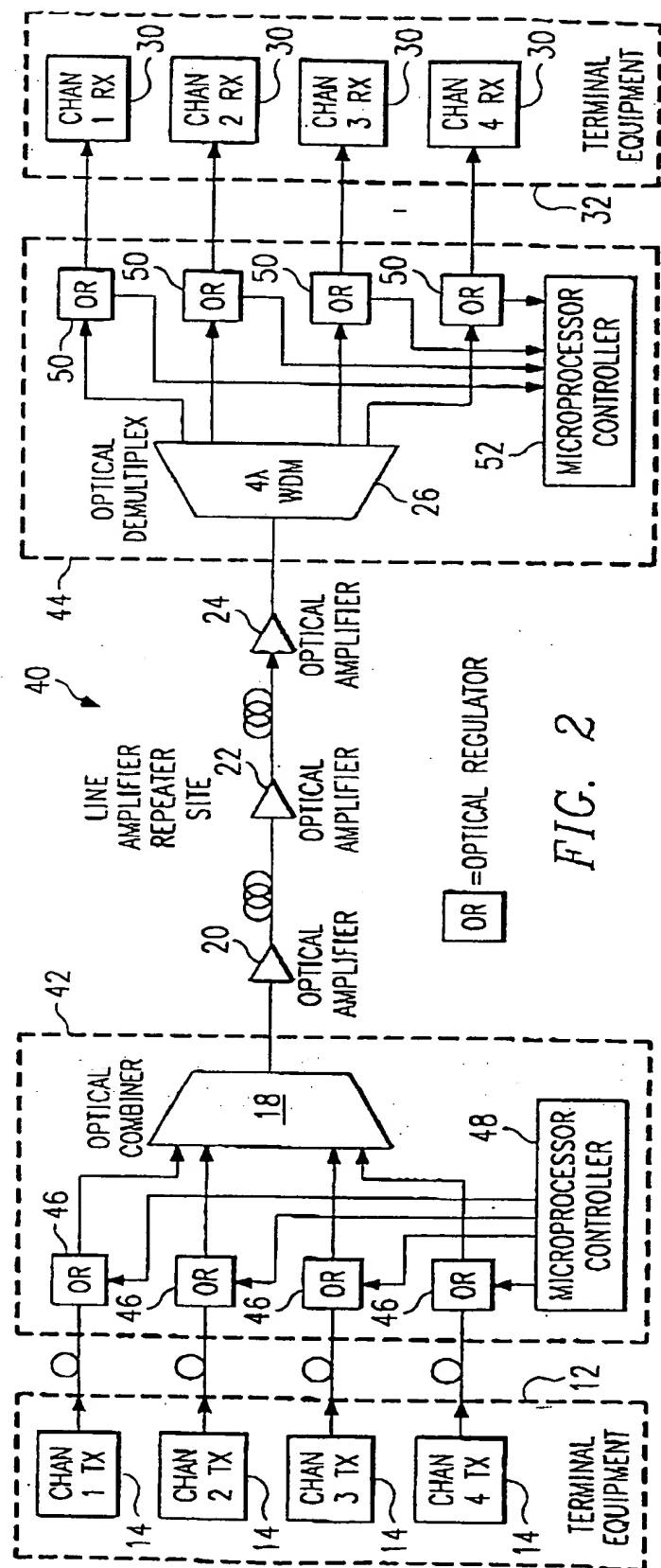
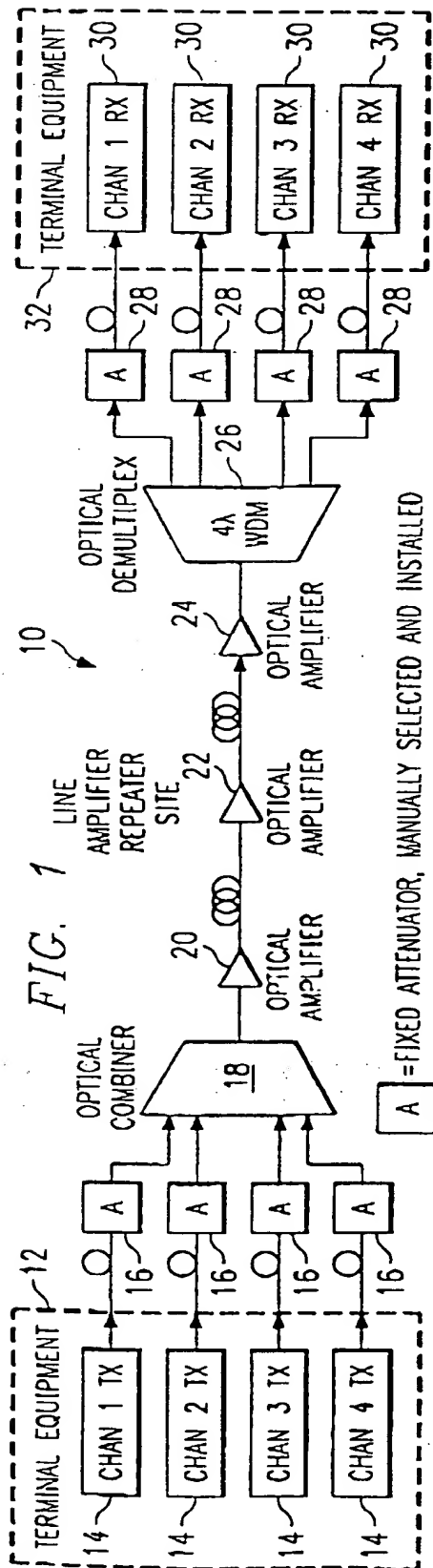
16. The system of Claim 14, wherein the controller is further operable to:

25

monitor each of the optical signals on the plurality of transmission channels at multiple points along each transmission channel; and

generate a plurality of feedback control signals responsive to the monitoring of the optical signals.

30





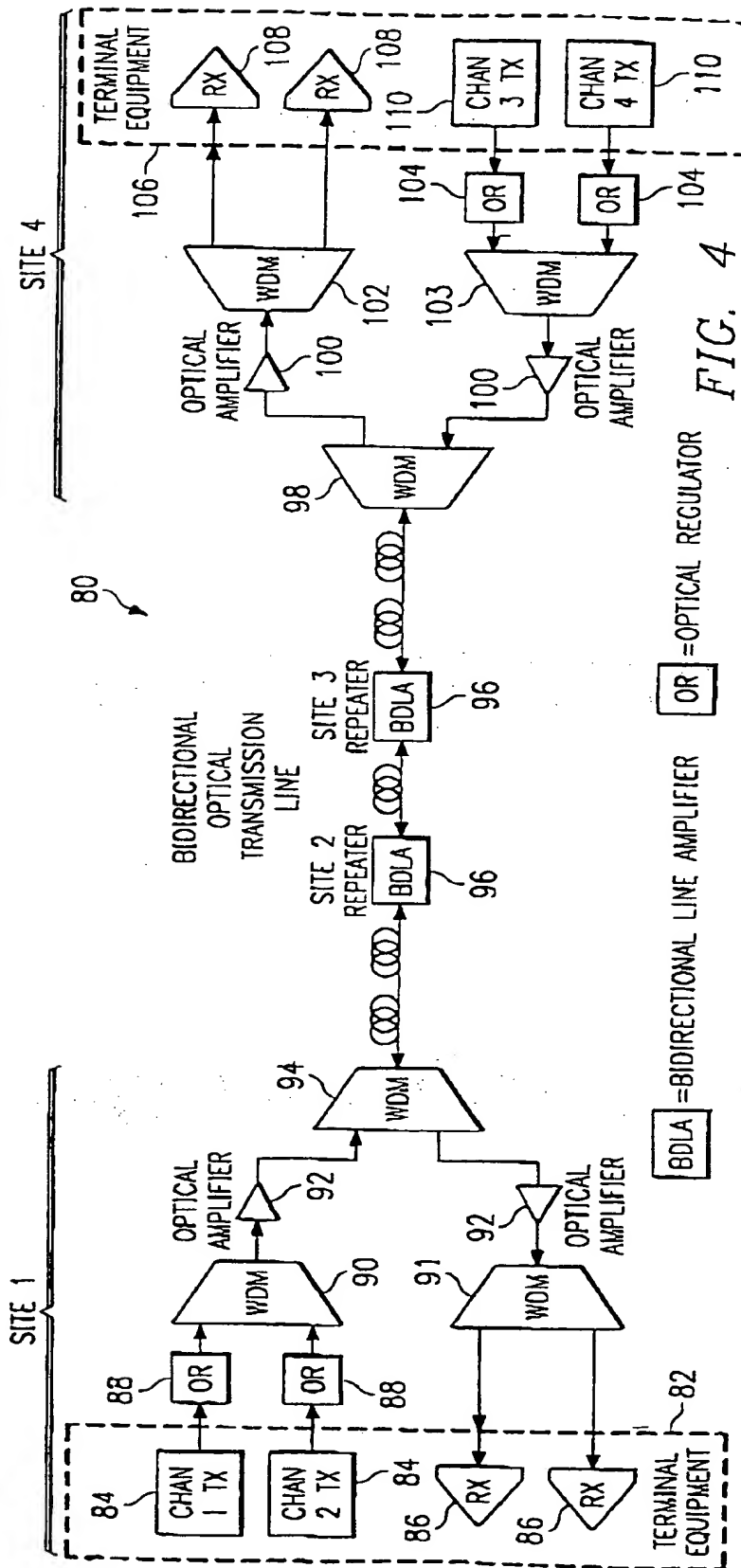
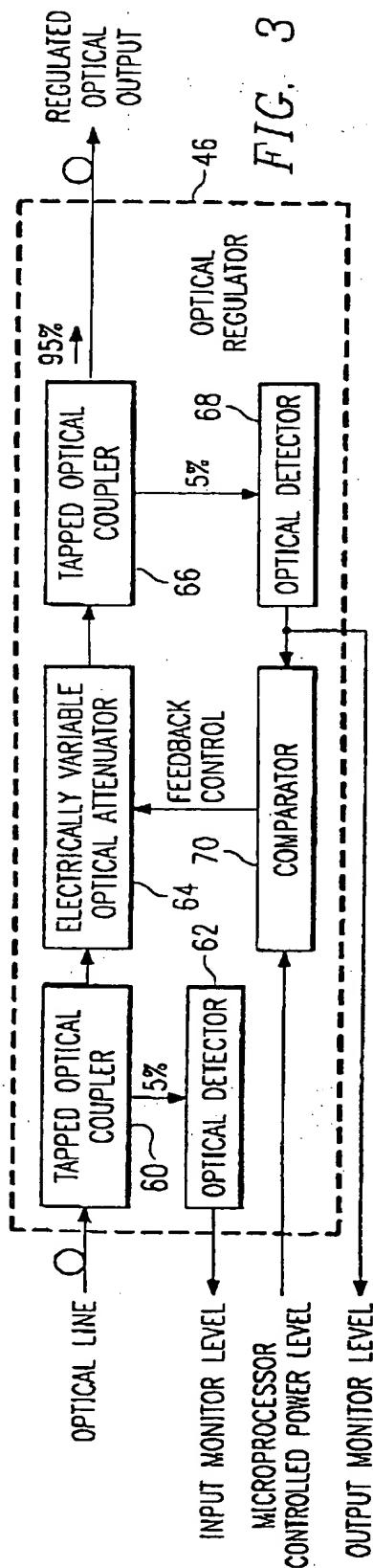


FIG. 5

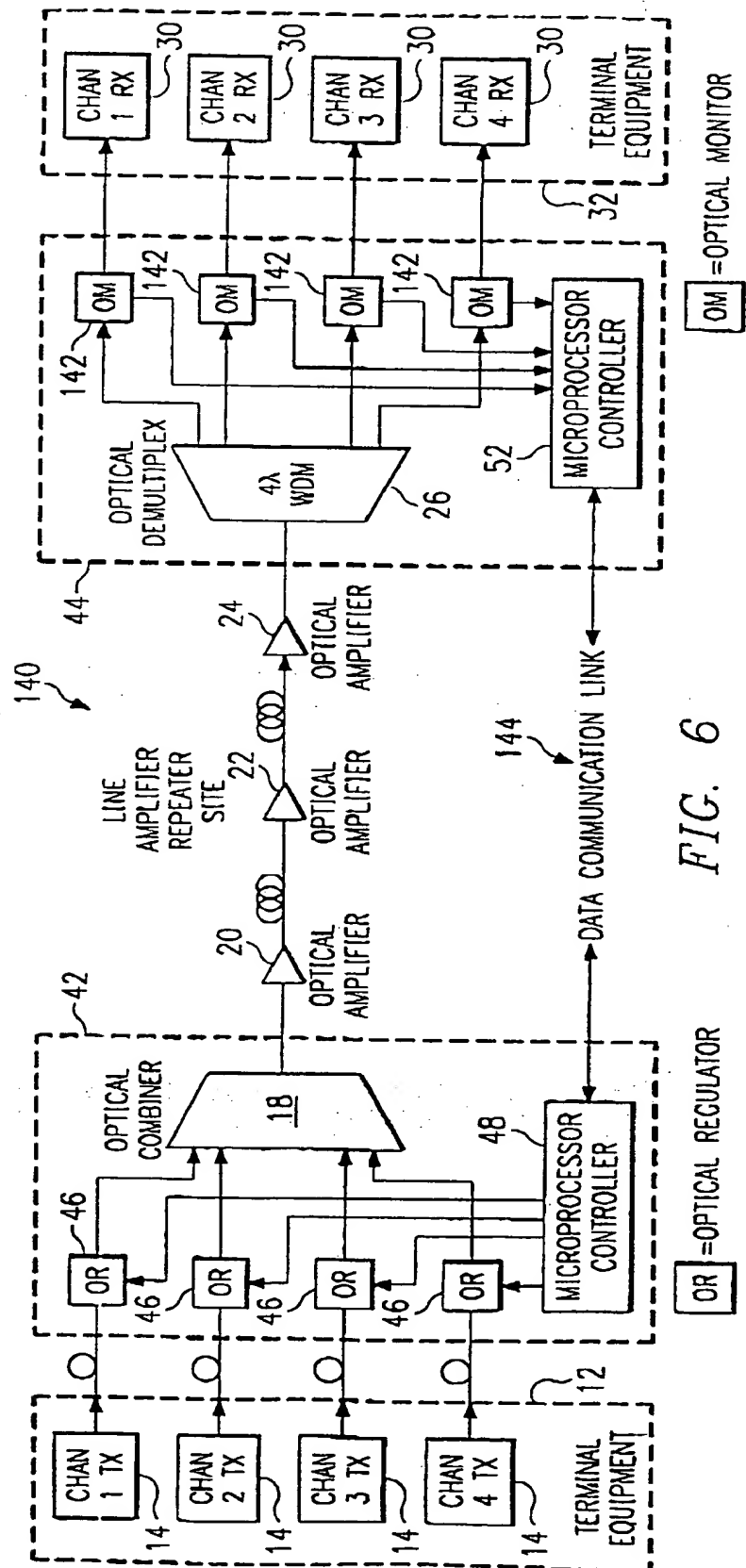


FIG. 6

# INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.  
PCT/US98/20747

## A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(6) : HO4J 14/02; HO4B 10/00

US CL : 359/110,124,127, 161; 385/140

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

## B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 359/110,124,127, 161; 385/140

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

## C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X, P	US 5,815,299 A (BAYART ET AL.) 29 September 1998. Fig. 2	9-10,12,13 14-16

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. ☐ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:	* T* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
* A* document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	* X* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
* E* earlier document published on or after the international filing date	* Y* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
* L* document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	* A* document member of the same patent family
* O* document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	
* P* document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	

Date of the actual completion of the international search  
30 NOVEMBER 1998

Date of mailing of the international search report  
21 JAN 1999

Name and mailing address of the ISA/US  
Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks  
Box PCT  
Washington, D.C. 20231  
Facsimile No. (703) 305-3230

Authorized officer *Toni Hill*  
KINFE-MICHAEL NEGASI  
Telephone No. (703) 305-4932

Form PCT/ISA/210 (second sheet)(July 1992)\*